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THE DRAGON

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THE DRAGON

A WONDER PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

LADY GREGORY



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TO
ANNE AND CATHERINE.

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THE PRINCE OF THE MARSHES.

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FINTAN, THE ASTROLOGER.

TAIG.

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GATEKEEPER.

TWO AUNTS OF THE PRINCE OF THE MARSHES.

FOREIGN MEN BRINGING IN FOOD.

THE DRAGON.

THE DRAGON

Act I.

SCENE : *A room in the King's house at Burren.*

Large window at back with deep window seat. Doors right and left. A small table and some chairs.

DALL GLIC (*coming in with tray, which he puts on table. Goes back to door.*) You can come in, King. There is no one here.

KING (*coming in.*) That's very good. I was in dread the Queen might be in it.

DALL GLIC. It is a good thought I had bringing it in here, and she gone to give learning to the Princess. She is not likely to come this side. It would be a great pity to annoy her.

KING (*hastily swallowing a mouthful.*) Look out now the door and keep a good watch. The time she will draw down upon me is when I am eating my little bite.

DALL GLIC. I'll do that. What I wouldn't see with my one eye, there's no other would see with three.

KING. A month to-day since I wed with her, and well pleased I am to be back in my own place. I give you word my teeth are rusting with the want of meat. On the journey I got no fair play. She wouldn't be willing to see me nourish myself, unless maybe with the marrow bone of a wren.

DALL GLIC. Sure she lays down she is but thinking of the good of your health.

KING. Maybe so. She is apt to be paying too much attention to what will be for mine and for the world's good. I kept my health fair and good, and the first wife not begrudging me my enough. I don't know what in the world wide led me not to stop as I was.

DALL GLIC. It is what you were saying, it was for the good of the Princess Nuala, and of yourself.

KING. That is what herself laid down. It would be a great ease to my mind, she was saying, to have in the house with the young girl, a far-off cousin of the King of Alban, and that had been conversation woman in his Court.

DALL GLIC. So it might be too. She is a great manager of people.

KING. She is that . . . I think I hear her coming. . . . Throw a cloth over the plates.

QUEEN (*coming in.*) I was in search of you.

KING. I thought you were in Nuala's sunny parlour, learning her to play music and to go through books.

QUEEN. That is what I thought to do. But I hadn't hardly started to teach her the principles of conversation, and the branches of relationship and kindred of the big people of the earth, when she plucked off the coverings I had put over the cages, and set open their doors, till the fiery birds of Sabes and the canaries of the eastern world were screeching around my head, giving out every class of cry and call.

KING. So they would too.

QUEEN. The royal eagles stirred up till I must quit the place with their squawking, and the enchanted swans raising up their heads and pecking at the beadwork on my gown.

KING. Ah, she has a wish for the birds of the air, that are by nature light and airy the same as herself.

QUEEN. It is time for her to turn her mind to good sense. What's that? (*whipping cloth from tray.*) Is it that you are eating again, and it is but one half-hour since your breakfast?

KING. Ah, that wasn't a breakfast you'd call a breakfast.

QUEEN. Very healthy food, oaten meal flummery with whey, and a griddle cake; dandelion tea and sorrel from the field.

KING. My old fathers ate their enough of wild herbs and the like in the early time of the world. I'm thinking that it is in my nature to

require a good share of nourishment as if to make up for the hardships they went through.

QUEEN. What now have you within that pastry wall?

KING. It is but a little leveret pie.

QUEEN (*poking with fork.*) Leveret! What's this in it? The thickness of a blanket of beef; calves' sweetbreads; cocks' combs; balls mixed with livers and with spice. You to so much as taste of it, you'll be crippled and crappedled with the gout, and roaring out in your pain.

KING. I tell you my generations have enough done of fasting and for making little of the juicy meats of the world.

QUEEN. And the waste of it! Goose eggs and jellies. . . . That much would furnish out a dinner for the whole of the King of Alban's Court.

KING. Ah, I wouldn't wish to be using anything at all, only for to gather strength for to steer the business of the whole of the kingdom!

QUEEN. Have you enough ate now, my dear? Are you satisfied?

KING. I am not. I would wish for a little taste of that saffron cake having in it raisins of the sun.

QUEEN. Saffron! Are you raving? You to have within you any of the four-and-twenty sicknesses of the race, it would throw it out in red blisters on your skin.

KING. Let me just taste one little slab of that venison ham.

QUEEN (*poking with a fork.*) It would take seven chewings! Sudden death it would be! Leave it alone now and rise up. To keep in health every man should quit the table before he is satisfied—there are some would walk to the door and back with every bite.

KING. Is it that I am to eat my meal standing, the same as a crane in a shallow, or moving from tuft to thistle like you'd see a jennet on the high road?

QUEEN. Well, at the least, let you drink down a share of this tansy juice. I was telling you it would be answerable to your health.

KING. You are doing entirely too much for me.

QUEEN. Sure I am here to be comfortable to you. This house before I came into it was but a ship without a rudder! Here now, take the spoon in your hand.

DALL GLIC. Leave it there, Queen, and I'll engage he'll swallow it down bye-and-bye.

QUEEN. Is it that *you* are meddling, Dall Glic? It is time some person took you in hand. I wonder now could that dark eye of yours be cured?

DALL GLIC. It is given in that it can not, by doctors and by druids.

QUEEN. That is a pity now, it gives you a sort of a one-sided look. It might not be so hard a thing to put out the sight of the other.

DALL GLIC. I'd sooner leave them the way they are.

QUEEN. I'll put a knot on my handkerchief till such time as I can give my mind to it. . . . Now, my dear (*to KING*) make no more delay. It is right to drink it down after your meal. The stomach to be bare empty, the medicine might prey upon the body till it would be wore away and consumed.

KING. Time enough. Let it settle now for a minute.

QUEEN. Here, now, I'll hold your nose the way you will not get the taste of it. (*She holds spoon to his mouth. A ball flies in at window; he starts and medicine is spilled.*)

PRINCESS (*coming in with NURSE.*) Is it true what they are telling me?

QUEEN. Do you see that you near hit the King with your ball, and, what is worse again, you have his medicine spilled from the spoon?

PRINCESS (*patting him.*) Poor old King.

QUEEN. Have you your lessons learned?

PRINCESS (*throwing books in the air.*) Neither line nor letter of them! Poem book! Brehon Laws! I have done with books! I am seventeen years old to-day!

QUEEN. There is no one would think it and you so flighty as you are.

PRINCESS (*to KING.*) Is it true that the cook is gone away?

KING (*aghast.*) What's that you're saying?

QUEEN. Don't be annoying the King's mind with such things. He should be hidden from every trouble and care.

PRINCESS. Was it you sent him away?

QUEEN. Not at all. If he went it was through foolishness and pride.

PRINCESS. It is said in the house that you annoyed him.

QUEEN. I never annoyed any person in my life, unless it might be for their own good. But it fails some to recognise their best friend. Just teaching him I was to pickle onion thin-nings as it was done at the King of Alban's Court.

PRINCESS. Didn't he know that before?

QUEEN. Whether or no, he gave me very little thanks, but turned around and asked his wages. Hurrying him and harrying him he said I was, and away with him, himself and his four-and-twenty apprentices.

KING. That is bad news, and pitiful news.

QUEEN. Do not be troubling yourself at all. It will be easy find another.

KING. It might not be easy to find so good a one. A great pity! A dinner or a supper

not to be rightly dressed is apt to give no pleasure in the eating or in the bye-and-bye.

QUEEN. I have taken it in hand. I have a good headpiece! I put out a call with running lads, and with the army captains through the whole of the five provinces; and along with that, I have it put up on tablets at the post office.

PRINCESS. I am sorry the old one to be gone. To remember him is nearly the farthest spot in my memory.

QUEEN (*sharply.*) If you want the house to be under your hand only, it is best for you to settle into one of your own.

PRINCESS. Give me the little rush cabin by the stream and I'll be content.

QUEEN. If you mind yourself and profit by my instruction it is maybe not a cabin you will be moving to but a palace.

PRINCESS. I'm tired of palaces. There are too many people in them.

QUEEN. That is talking folly. When you settle yourself it must be in the station where you were born.

PRINCESS. I have no mind to settle myself yet awhile.

NURSE. Ah, you will not be saying that the time Mr. Right will come down the chimney, and will give you the marks and tokens of a king.

QUEEN. There might have some come looking for her before this, if it was not for you petting and pampering her the way you do, and encouraging her flightiness and follies. It is likely she will get no offers till such time as I will have taught her the manners and the right customs of courts.

NURSE. Sure I am acquainted with courts myself. Wasn't it I fostered comely Manus that is presently King of Sorcha, since his father went out of the world? And as to lovers coming to look for her! They do be coming up to this as plenty as the eye could hold them, and she refusing them, and they laying the blame upon the King!

KING. That is so, they laying the blame upon myself. There was the uncle of the King of Leinster; he never sent me another car-load of asparagus from the time you banished him away.

PRINCESS. He was a widower man.

KING. As to the heir of Orkney, since the time you sent him to the right about, I never got so much as a conger eel from his hand.

PRINCESS. As dull as a fish he was. He had a fish's eyes.

KING. That wasn't so with the champion of the merings of Ulster.

PRINCESS. A freckled man. He had hair the colour of a fox.

KING. I wish he didn't stop sending me his tribute of heather beer.

QUEEN. It is a poor daughter that will not wish to be helpful to her father.

PRINCESS. If I am to wed for the furnishing of my father's table, it's as good for you to wrap me in a speckled fawnskin and roast me! (*Runs out, tossing her ball.*)

QUEEN. She is no way fit for marriage unless with a herd to the birds of the air, till she has a couple of years schooling.

KING. It would be hard to put her back to that.

QUEEN. I must take it in hand. She is getting entirely too much of her own way.

NURSE. Leave her alone, and in the end it will be a good way.

QUEEN. To keep rules and hours she must learn, and to give in to order and good sense. (*To KING.*) There is a pigeon messenger I brought from Alban I am about to let loose on this day with news of myself and of yourself. I will send with it a message to a friend I have, bidding her to make ready for Nuala a place in her garden of learning and her school.

KING. That is going too fast. There is no hurry.

QUEEN. She is seventeen years. There is no day to be lost. I will go write the letter.

NURSE. Oh, you wouldn't send away the poor child!

DALL GLIC. It would be a great hardship to send her so far. Our poor little Princess Nu!

QUEEN (*sharply.*) What are you saying?
(DALL GLIC *is silent.*)

KING. I would not wish her to be sent out of this.

QUEEN. There is no other way to set her mind to sense and learning. It will be for her own good.

NURSE. Where's the use troubling her with lessons and with books that maybe she will never be in need of at all. Speak up for her, King.

KING. Let her stop for this year as she is.

QUEEN. You are all too soft and too easy. She will turn on you and will blame you for it, and another year or two years slipped by.

NURSE. That she may!

DALL GLIC. Who knows what might take place within the twelvemonth that is coming?

KING. Ah, don't be talking about it. Maybe it never might come to pass.

DALL GLIC. It will come to pass, if there is truth in the clouds of sky.

KING. It will not be for a year, anyway. There'll be many an ebbing and flowing of the tide within a year.

QUEEN. What at all are you talking about?

KING. Ah, where's the use of talking too much.

QUEEN. Making riddles you are, and striving to keep the meaning from your comrade, that is myself.

KING. It's best not be thinking about the thing you would not wish, and maybe it might never come around at all. To strive to forget a threat yourself, it might maybe be forgotten by the universe.

QUEEN. Is it true some thing was threatened?

KING. How would I know is anything true, and the world so full of lies as it is?

NURSE. That is so. He might have been wrong in his foretelling. What is he in the finish but an old prophecy?

DALL GLIC. Is it of Fintan you are saying that?

QUEEN. And who, will you tell me, is Fintan?

DALL GLIC. Anyone that never heard tell of Fintan never heard anything at all.

QUEEN. His name was not up on the tablets of big men at the King of Alban's Court, or of Britain.

NURSE. Ah, sure in those countries they are without religion or belief.

QUEEN. Is it that there was a prophecy?

KING. Don't mind it. What are prophecies? Don't we hear them every day of the week?

And if one comes true there may be seven blind and come to nothing.

QUEEN (*to DALL GLIC.*) I must get to the root of this, and the handle. Who, now, is Fintan?

DALL GLIC. He is an astrologer, and understanding the nature of the stars.

NURSE. He wore out in his lifetime three eagles and three palm trees and three earthen dykes. It is down in a cleft of the rocks beyond he has his dwelling presently, the way he can be watching the stars through the daytime.

DALL GLIC. He prophesied in a prophecy, and it is written in clean letters in the King's yew-tree box.

KING. It is best to keep it out of sight. It being to be, it will be; and, if not, where's the use troubling our mind?

QUEEN. Sound it out to me.

DALL GLIC (*looking from window and drawing curtain.*) There is no story in the world is worse to me or more pitiful; I wouldn't wish any person to hear.

NURSE. Oh, take care would it come to the ears of my darling Nu!

DALL GLIC. It is said by himself and the heavens that in a year from this day the King's daughter will be brought away and devoured by a scaly Green Dragon that will come from the North of the World.

QUEEN. A Dragon! I thought you were talking of some danger. I wouldn't give in to dragons. I never saw one. I'm not in dread of beasts unless it might be a mouse in the night-time!

KING. Put it out of mind. It is likely anyway that the world will soon be ended the way it is.

QUEEN. I will send and search out this astrologer and will question him.

DALL GLIC. You have not far to search. He is outside at the kitchen door at this minute, and as if questing after something, and it a half-score and seven years since I knew him to come out of his cave.

KING. Do not! He might waken up the Dragon and put him in mind of the girl, for to make his own foretelling come true.

NURSE. Ah, such a thing cannot be! The poor innocent child! (*Weeps.*)

QUEEN. Where's the use of crying and roaring? The thing must be stopped and put an end to. I don't say I give in to your story, but that would be an unnatural death. I would be scandalised being stepmother to a girl that would be swallowed by a sea-serpent!

NURSE. Ochone! Don't be talking of it at all!

QUEEN. At the King of Alban's Court, one of the royal family to die over, it will be

naturally on a pillow, and the dead-bells ringing, and a burying with white candles, and crape on the knocker of the door, and a flag-stone put over the grave. What way could we put a stone or so much as a rose-bush over Nuala and she in the inside of a water-worm might be ploughing its way down to the north of the world?

NURSE. Och! that is what is killing me entirely! O save her, save her.

KING. I tell you, it being to be, it will be.

QUEEN. You may be right, so, when you would not go to the expense of paying her charges at the Royal school. But wait, now, there is a plan coming into my mind.

NURSE. There must surely be some way!

QUEEN. It is likely a king's daughter the beast—if there is a beast—will come questing after, and not after a king's wife.

DALL GLIC. That is according to custom.

QUEEN. That's what I am saying. What we have to do is to join Nuala with a man of a husband, and she will be safe from the danger ahead of her. In all the inventions made by poets, for to put terror on children or to knock laughter out of fools, did any of you ever hear of a Dragon swallowing the wedding-ring?

ALL. We never did.

QUEEN. It's easy enough so. There must be no delay till Nuala will be married and wed

with someone that will bring her away out of this, and let the Dragon go hungry home!

NURSE. That she may! Isn't it a pity now she being so hard to please!

QUEEN. Young people are apt to be selfish and to have no thought but for themselves. She must not be hard to please when it will be to save and to serve her family and to keep up respect for their name. Here she is coming.

NURSE. Ah, you would not tell her! You would not put the dear child under the shadow of such a terror and such a threat!

KING. She must not be told. I never could bear up against it.

(Nuala comes in.)

QUEEN. Look now at your father the way he is.

PRINCESS *(touching his hand.)* What is fretting you?

QUEEN. His heart as weighty as that the chair near broke under him.

PRINCESS. I never saw you this way before.

QUEEN. And all on the head of yourself!

PRINCESS. I am sorry, and very sorry, for that.

QUEEN. He is loth to say it to you, but he is tired and wore out waiting for you to settle with some match. See what a troubled look he has on his face.

PRINCESS (*to KING.*) Is it that you want me to leave you? (*He gives a sob.*) (*To DALL GLIC.*) Is it the Queen urged him to this?

DALL GLIC. If she did, it was surely for your good.

NURSE. Oh, my child and my darling, let you strive to take a liking to some good man that will come!

PRINCESS. Are you going against me with the rest?

NURSE. You know well I would never do that!

PRINCESS. Do you, father, urge me to go?

KING. They are in too big a hurry. Why wouldn't they wait a while, for a quarter, or three-quarters of a year.

PRINCESS. Is that all the delay I am given, and the term is set for me, like a servant that would be banished from the house?

KING. That's not it. That's not right. I would never give in to let you go . . . if it wasn't . . .

PRINCESS. I know (*stands up.*) For my own good!

(*Trumpet outside.*)

GATEKEEPER (*coming in.*) There is company at the door.

QUEEN. Who is it?

GATEKEEPER. Servants, and a company of women, and one that would seem to be a Prince, and young.

PRINCESS. Then he is come asking me in marriage.

DALL GLIC. Who is he at all?

GATEKEEPER. They were saying he is the son of the King of the Marshes.

KING. Go bring him in. (GATEKEEPER goes.)

DALL GLIC. That's right! He has great riches and treasure. There are some say he is the first match in Ireland.

NURSE. He is not. If his father has a copper crown, and our own King a silver one, it is the King of Sorchá has a crown of gold! The young King of Sorchá that is the first match.

DALL GLIC. If he is, this one is apt to be the second first.

QUEEN. Do you hear, Nuala, what luck is flowing to you?

DALL GLIC. Do not now be turning your back on him as you did to so many.

PRINCESS. No; whoever he is, it is likely I will not turn away from this one.

QUEEN. Go now and ready yourself to meet him.

PRINCESS. Am I not nice enough the way I am?

QUEEN. You are not. The King of Alban's daughter has hair as smooth as if a cow had licked it. (PRINCESS goes.)

GATEKEEPER. Here is the Prince of the Marshes!

(Enter PRINCE, very young and timid, an old lady on each side slightly in advance of him.)

KING. A great welcome before you. . . .
And who may these be?

PRINCE. Seven aunts I have . . .

FIRST AUNT (*interrupting.*) If he has, there are but two of us have come along with him.

SECOND AUNT. For to care him and be company for him on his journey, it being the first time he ever quitted home.

QUEEN. This is a great honour. Will you take a chair?

FIRST AUNT. Leave that for the Prince of the Marshes. It is away from the draught of the window.

SECOND AUNT. We ourselves are in charge of his health. I have here his eel-skin boots for the days that will be wet under foot.

FIRST AUNT. And I have here my little bag of cures, with a cure in it that would rise the body out of the grave as whole and as sound as the time you were born. (*Lays it down.*)

KING (*to PRINCE.*) It is many a day your father and myself were together in our early

time. What way is he? He was farther out in age than myself.

PRINCE. He is . . .

FIRST AUNT (*interrupting.*) He is only middling these last years. The doctors have taken him in hand.

KING. He was more for fowling, and I was more for horses—before I increased so much in girth. Is it for horses you are, Prince?

PRINCE. I didn't go up on one up to this.

FIRST AUNT. Kings and princes are getting scarce. They are the most class is wearing away, and it is right for them keep in mind their safety.

SECOND AUNT. The Prince has no need to go upon a horse, where he has always a coach at his command.

KING. It is fowling that suits you so?

PRINCE. I would be well pleased . . .

FIRST AUNT. There is great danger going out fowling with a gun that might turn on you after and take your life.

SECOND AUNT. Why would the Prince go into danger, having servants that will go following after birds?

QUEEN. He is likely waiting till his enemies will make an attack upon the country to defend it.

FIRST AUNT. There is a good dyke around about the Marshes, and a sort of quaking bog.

It is not likely war will come till such time as it will be made by the birds of the air.

KING. Well, we must strive to knock out some sport or some pleasure.

PRINCE. It was not on pleasure I was sent.

FIRST AUNT. That's so, but on business.

SECOND AUNT. Very weighty business.

KING. Let the lad tell it out himself.

PRINCE. I hope there is no harm in me coming hither. I would be loth to push on you . . .

FIRST AUNT. We thought it was right, as he was come to sensible years . . .

KING. Stop a minute, ma'am, give him his time.

PRINCE. My father . . . and his counsellors . . . and my seven aunts . . . that said it would be right for me to join with a wife.

QUEEN. They showed good sense in that.

PRINCE (*rapidly*.) They bade me come and take a look at your young lady of a Princess to see would she be likely to be pleasing to them.

FIRST AUNT. That's it, and that is what brought ourselves along with him—to see would we be satisfied.

KING. I don't know. The girl is young—she's young.

FIRST AUNT. It is what we were saying, that might be no drawback. It might be easier train

her in our own ways, and to do everything that is right.

KING. Sure we are all wishful to do the thing that is right, but it's sometimes hard to know.

SECOND AUNT. Not in our place. What the King of the Marshes would not know, his counsellors and ourselves would know.

QUEEN. It will be very answerable to the Princess to be under such good guidance.

FIRST AUNT. For low people and for middling people it is well enough to follow their own opinion and their will. But for the Prince's wife to have any choice or any will of her own, the people would not believe her to be a *real* princess.

(PRINCESS *comes to door, listening unseen.*)

KING. Ah, you must not be too strict with a girl that has life in her.

PRINCE. My seven aunts that were saying they have a great distrust of any person that is lively.

FIRST AUNT. We would rather than the greatest beauty in the world get him a wife who would be content to stop in her home.

(PRINCESS *comes in very stately and with a fine dress. She curtseys. AUNTS curtsey and sit down again. PRINCE bows uneasily and sidles away.*)

FIRST AUNT. Will you sit, now, between the two of us?

PRINCESS. It is more fitting for a young girl to stay in her standing in the presence of a king's kindred and his son, since he is come so far to look for me.

SECOND AUNT. That is a very nice thought.

PRINCESS. My far-off grandmother, the old people were telling me, never sat at the table to put a bit in her mouth till such time as her lord had risen up satisfied. She was that obedient to him that if he had bidden her, she would have laid down her hand upon red coals. (PRINCE *looks bored and fidgets.*)

FIRST AUNT. Very good indeed.

PRINCESS. That was a habit with my grandmother. I would wish to follow in her ways.

KING. This is some new talk.

QUEEN. Stop; she is speaking fair and good.

PRINCESS. A little verse, made by some good wife, I used to be learning. "I always should : Be very good : At home should mind : My husband kind : Abroad obey : What people say."

FIRST AUNT (*getting up.*) To travel the world, I never thought to find such good sense before me. Do you hear that, Prince?

PRINCE. Sure I often heard yourselves shaping that sort.

SECOND AUNT. I'll engage the royal family

will make no objection to this young lady taking charge of your house.

PRINCESS. I can do that! (*Counts on fingers.*) To send linen to the washing-tub on Monday, and dry it on Tuesday, and to mangle it Wednesday, and starch it Thursday, and iron it Friday, and fold it in the press against Sunday!

SECOND AUNT. Indeed there is little to learn you! And on Sundays, now, you will go driving in a painted coach, and your dress sewed with gold and with pearls, and the poor of the world envying you on the road.

QUEEN (*claps hands.*) There is no one but must envy her, and all that is before her for her lifetime!

FIRST AUNT. Here is the golden arm-ring the Prince brought for to slip over your hand.

SECOND AUNT. It was put on all our generations of queens at the time of the making of their match.

PRINCESS (*drawing back her hand.*) Mine is not made yet.

FIRST AUNT. Didn't you hear me saying, and the Prince saying, there is nothing could be laid down against it.

PRINCESS. There is one thing against it.

QUEEN. Oh, there can be nothing worth while!

PRINCESS. A thing you would think a great drawback and all your kindred would think it.

QUEEN (*rapidly*.) There is nothing, but maybe that she is not so tall as you might think, through the length of the heels of her shoes.

SECOND AUNT. We would put up with that much.

PRINCESS (*rapidly*.) It is that there was a spell put upon me—by a water-witch that was of my kindred. At some hours of the day I am as you see me, but at other hours I am changed into a sea-filly from the Country-under-Wave. And when I smell salt on the west wind I must race and race and race. And when I hear the call of the gulls or the sea-eagles over my head, I must leap up to meet them till I can hardly tell what is my right element, is it the high air or is it the loosened spring-tide!

QUEEN. Stop your nonsense! talk. She is gone wild and raving with the great luck that is come to her!

(PRINCE *has stood up, and is watching her eagerly.*)

PRINCESS. I feel a wind at this very time that is blowing from the wilderness of the sea, and I am changing with it. . . . There (*pulls down her hair.*) Let my mane go free! I will race you, Prince, I will race you! The wind of March will not overtake me, Prince, and I run-

ning on the top of the white waves! (*Runs out; PRINCE entranced, rushes to door.*)

AUNTS (*catching hold of him.*) Are you going mad wild like herself?

PRINCE. Oh, I will go after her!

FIRST AUNT (*clutching him.*) Do not! She will drag you to destruction.

PRINCE (*struggling to door.*) What matter! Let me go or she will escape me! (*shaking himself free.*) I will never stop till I come to her! (*He rushes out, SECOND AUNT still holding on to him.*)

FIRST AUNT. What at all has come upon him? I never knew him this way before! (*She trots after him.*)

PRINCESS (*comes leaping in by window.*) They are gone running the road to Muckanish! But they won't find me!

QUEEN. You have a right to be ashamed of yourself and your play-game. It's easy for you to go joking, having neither cark nor care: that is no way to treat the second best match in Ireland!

KING. You were saying you had your mind made up to take him.

PRINCESS. It failed me to do it! Himself and his counsellors and his seven aunts!

QUEEN. He will give out that you are crazed and mad.

PRINCESS. He will be thankful to his life's end to have got free of me!

KING. I don't know. It seemed to me he was better pleased with you in the finish than in the commencement. But I'm in dread his father may not be well pleased.

PRINCESS (*patting him.*) Which now of the two of you is the most to be pitied? He to have such a timid son or you to have such an unruly daughter?

QUEEN. It is likely he will make an attack on you. There was a war made by the King of Britain on the head of a terrier pup that was sent to him and that made away on the road following hares. It's best for you make ready to put yourself at the head of your troop.

KING. It's long since I went into my battle dress. I'm in dread it would not close upon my chest.

QUEEN. Ah, it might, so soon as you would go through a few hardships in the fight.

KING. If the rest of Adam's race was of my opinion there'd be no fighting in the world at all.

QUEEN. It is this child's stubbornness is leading you into it. Go out, Nuala, after the Prince. Tell him you are sorry you made a fool of him.

PRINCESS. He was that before—thinking to put me sitting and sewing in a cushioned chair.

listening to stories of kings making a slaughter of one another.

QUEEN. Tell him you have changed your mind, that you were but funning; that you will wed with him yet.

PRINCESS. I would sooner wed with the King of Poison! I to have to go to his kingdom, I'd sooner go earning my wages footing turf, with a skirt of heavy flannel and a dress of the grey frieze! Himself and his bogs and his frogs!

QUEEN. I tell you it is time for you to take a husband.

PRINCESS. You said that before! And I was giving in a while ago, and I felt the blood of my heart to be rising against it! And I will not give in to you again! It is my own business and I will take my own way.

QUEEN (*to KING.*) This is all one with the raving of a hag against heaven!

KING. What the Queen is saying is right. Try now and come around to it.

PRINCESS. She has set you against me with her talk!

QUEEN (*to KING.*) It is best for you to lay orders on her.

PRINCESS. The King is not under your orders!

QUEEN. You are striving to make him give in to your own!

KING. I will take orders from no one at all!

QUEEN. Bid her go bring back the Prince.

PRINCESS. I say that I will not!

QUEEN. She is standing up against you!
Will you give in to that?

KING. I am bothered with the whole of you!
I will give in to nothing at all!

QUEEN. Make her do your bidding so.

KING. Can't you do as you are told?

PRINCESS. This concerns myself.

KING. It does, and the whole of us.

PRINCESS. Do you think you can force me
to wed?

KING. I do think it, and I will do it.

PRINCESS. It will fail you!

KING. It will not! I was too easy with you
up to this.

PRINCESS. Will you turn me out of the
house?

KING. I will give you my word, it is little
but I will!

PRINCESS. Then I have no home and no
father! It is to my mother you must give an
account. You know well it is with the first
wife you will go at the Judgment!

QUEEN. Is it that you would make threats
to the King? And put insults upon myself?
Now she is daring and defying you! Let you
put an end to it!

KING. I will do that! (*Stands up.*) I swear by the oath my people swear by, the seven things common to us all; by sun and moon; sea and dew; wind and water; the hours of the day and night, I will give you in marriage and in wedlock to the first man that will come into the house!

PRINCESS (*shrinking as from a blow.*) It is the Queen has done this.

QUEEN. I will give you out the reason, and see will you put blame on me or praise!

NURSE. Oh, let you stop and not draw it down upon her!

QUEEN. It is right for me to tell it; it is true telling! You not to be married and wed by this day twelvemonth, there will a terrible thing happen you . . .

NURSE. Be quiet! Don't you see Fintan himself that is looking in the window!

KING. Fintan! What is it bring you here on this day?

FINTAN (*a very old man in strange clothes at window.*) What brings me is to put my curse upon the whole tribe of kitchen boys that are gone and vanished out of this, without bringing me my request, that was a bit of rendered lard that would limber the swivel of my spy-glass, that is clogged with the dripping of the cave.

NURSE. And you have no bad news?

QUEEN. Nothing to say on the head of the Princess, this being, as it is, her birthday?

FINTAN. What birthday? This is not a birthday that signifies. It is the next will be the birthday will be concerned with the great story that is foretold.

QUEEN. It is right for her to know it.

KING. It is not! It is not!

PRINCESS. Whatever the story is, let me know it, and not be treated as a child that is without courage or sense.

FINTAN. It's long till I'll come out from my cleft again, and getting no peace or quiet on the ridge of the earth. It is laid down by the stars that cannot lie, that on this day twelvemonth, you yourself will be ate and devoured by a scaly Green Dragon from the North!

END OF ACT I.



ACT II.

SCENE : *The Same.* PRINCESS and NURSE.

NURSE. Cheer up now, my honey bird, and don't be fretting.

PRINCESS. It is not easy to quit fretting, and the terrible story you are after telling me of all that is before and all that is behind me.

NURSE. They had no right at all to go make you aware of it. The Queen has too much talk. An unlucky stepmother she is to you !

PRINCESS. It is well for me she is here. It is well I am told the truth, where the whole of you were treating me like a child without sense, so giddy I was and contrary, and petted and humoured by the whole of you. What memory would there be left of me and my little life gone by, but of a headstrong, unruly child with no thought but for myself.

NURSE. No, but the best in the world you are; there is no one seeing you pass by but would love you.

PRINCESS. That is not so. I was wild and taking my own way, mocking and humbugging.

NURSE. I never will give in that there is no way to save you from that Dragon that is foretold to be your destruction. I would give the

four divisions of the world, and Ireland along with them, if I could see you pelting your ball in at the window the same as an hour ago!

PRINCESS. Maybe you will, so long as it will hurt nobody.

NURSE. Ah, sure it's no wonder there to be the tracks of tears upon your face, and that great terror before you.

PRINCESS. I will wipe them away! I will not give in to danger or to dragons! No one will see a dark face on me. I am a king's daughter of Ireland. I did not come out of a herd's hut like Deirdre that went sighing and lamenting till she was put to death, the world being sick and tired of her complaints, and her finger at her eye dripping tears!

NURSE. That's right, now. You had always great courage.

PRINCESS. There is like a change within me. You never will hear a cross word from me again. I would wish to be pleasant and peaceable until such time . . . (*Puts handkerchief to eyes and goes.*)

DALL GLIC (*coming in.*) The King is greatly put out with all he went through, and the way the passion rose in him a while ago.

NURSE. That he may be twenty times worse before he is better! Showing such fury towards the innocent child the way he did!

DALL GLIC. The Queen has brought him to the grass plot for to give him his exercise, walking his seven steps east and west.

NURSE. Hasn't she great power over him to make him do that much?

DALL GLIC. I tell you I am in dread of her myself. Some plan she has for making my two eyes equal. I vexed her someway, and she got queer and humpy, and put a lip on herself, and said she would take me in hand. I declare I never will have a minute's ease thinking of it.

NURSE. The King should have done his seven steps, for I hear her coming.

(DALL GLIC goes to recess of window.)

QUEEN (*coming in.*) Did you, Nurse, ever at any time turn and dress a dinner?

NURSE (*very stiff.*) Indeed I never did. Any house I ever was in there was a good kitchen and well attended, the Lord be praised!

QUEEN. Ah, but just to be kind and to oblige the King.

NURSE. Troth, the same King will wait long till he'll see any dish I will ready for him! I am not one that was reared between the flags and the oven in the corner of the one room! To be a nurse to King's children is my trade, and not to go stirring mashies, for hens or for humans!

QUEEN. I heard a crafty woman lay down one time there was no way to hold a man, only by food and flattery.

NURSE. Sure any mother of children walking the road could tell you that much.

QUEEN. I went maybe too far urging him not to lessen so much food the way he did. I only thought to befriend him. But now he is someway upset and nothing will rightly smooth him but to be thinking upon his next meal; and what it will be I don't know, unless the berries of the bush.

DALL GLIC (*leaning out of the window.*) Here! Hi! Come this way!

QUEEN. Who are you calling to?

DALL GLIC. It is someone with the appearance of a cook.

QUEEN. Are you saying it is a cook? That now will put the King in great humour!

(*MANUS appears at the window.*)

NURSE (*looking at him.*) I wouldn't hardly think he'd suit. He has a sort of innocent look. I would say him to be but a country lad. I don't know is he fitted to go readying meals for a royal family, and the King so wrathful if they do not please him as he is. And as to the Princess Nu! There to be the size of a hayseed of fat overhead on her broth, she'd fall in a dead faint.

MANUS. I'll go on so.

QUEEN. No, no. Bring him in till I'll take a look at him!

MANUS (*coming inside.*) I am a lad in search of a master.

MANUS (*inside.*) I am a lad in search of a master.

QUEEN. And I myself that am wanting a cook.

MANUS. I got word of that and I going the road.

QUEEN. You would seem to be but a young lad.

MANUS. I am not very far in age to-day. But I'll be a day older to-morrow.

QUEEN. In what country were you born and reared?

MANUS. I came from over, and I am coming hither.

QUEEN. What wages now would you be asking?

MANUS. Nothing at all unless what you think I will have earned at the time I will be leaving your service.

QUEEN. That is very right and fair. I hope you will not be asking too much help. The last cook had a whole fleet of scullions that were no use but to chatter and consume.

MANUS. I am asking no help at all but the

help of the ten I bring with me. (*Holds up fingers.*)

QUEEN. That will be a great saving in the house! Can I depend upon you now not to be turning to your own use the King's ale and his wine?

MANUS. If you take me to be a thief I will go upon my road. It was no easier for me to come than to go out again.

QUEEN (*holding him.*) No, now, don't be so proud and thinking so much of yourself. If I give you trial here I would wish you to be ready to turn your hand to this and that, and not be saying it is or is not your business.

MANUS. My business is to do as the King wishes.

QUEEN. That's right. That is the way the servants were in the palace of the King of Alban.

MANUS. That's the way I was myself in the King's house of Sorchá.

QUEEN. Are you saying it is from that place you are come? Sure that should be a great household! The King of Sorchá, they were telling me, has seven castles on land and seven on the sea, and provision for a year and a day in every one of them.

MANUS. That might be. I never was in more than one of them at the one time.

QUEEN. Anyone that has been in that place would surely be fitting here. Keep him, Nurse! Don't let him make away from us till I will go call the King! (*Goes out.*)

NURSE. Sure it was I myself that fostered the young King of Sorcha and reared him in my lap! What way is he at all? My lovely child! Give me news of him!

MANUS. I will do that

NURSE. To hear of him would delight me!

MANUS. It is I that can tell you. . . .

NURSE. It is himself should be a grand king!

MANUS. Listen till you hear!

NURSE. His father was good and his mother was good, and it's likely, himself will be the best of all!

MANUS. Be quiet now and hearken!

NURSE. I remember well the first day I saw him in the cradle, two and a score of years back! Oh, it is glad, and very glad, I'll be to get word of him!

MANUS. He is come to sensible years. . . .

NURSE. A golden cradle it was and it standing on four golden balls the very round of the sun!

MANUS. He is out of his cradle now (*shakes her shoulder.*) Let you hearken! He is in need of your help.

NURSE. He'll get it, he'll get it. I doted down on that child! The best to laugh and to roar!

MANUS (*putting hand on her mouth.*) Will you be silent, you hag of a nurse? Can't you see that I myself am Manus, the new King of Sorcha?

NURSE (*starting back.*) Do you say that? And how's every bit of you? Sure I'd know you in any place. Stand back till I'll get the full of my eyes of you! Like the father you are, and you need never be sorry to be that! Well, I said to myself and you looking in at the window, I would not believe but there's some drop of kings' blood in that lad!

MANUS. That was not what you said to me!

NURSE. And wasn't the journey long on you from Sorcha, that is at the rising of the sun? Is it your foot-soldiers and your bullies you brought with you, or did you come with your hound and your deer-hound and with your horn?

MANUS. There was no one knew of my journey. I came bare alone. I threw a shell in the sea and made a boat of it, and took the track of the wild duck across the mountains of the waves.

NURSE. And where in the world wide did you get that dress of a cook?

MANUS. It was at a tailor's place near Oughtmana. There was no one in the house but

the mother. I left my own clothes in her charge and my purse of gold; I brought nothing but my own blue sword. (*Throws open blouse and shows it.*) She gave me this suit, where a cook from this house had thrown it down in payment for a drink of milk. I have no mind any person should know I am a king. I am letting on to be a cook.

NURSE. I would sooner you to come as a champion seeking battle, or a horseman that had gone astray, or so far as a poet making praises or curses according to his treatment on the road. It would be a bad day I would see your father's son taken for a kitchen boy.

MANUS. I was through the world last night in a dream. It was dreamed to me that the King's daughter in this house is in a great danger.

NURSE. So she is, at the end of a twelve-month.

MANUS. My warning was for this day. Seeing her under trouble in my dream, my heart was hot to come to her help. I am here to save her, to meet every troublesome thing that will come at her.

NURSE. Oh, my heavy blessing on you doing that!

MANUS. I am not willing to come as a king, that she would feel tied and bound to live for if I live, or to die with if I should die. I am come

as a poor unknown man, that may slip away after the fight, to my own kingdom or across the borders of the world, and no thanks given him and no more about him, but a memory of the shadow of a cook!

NURSE. I would not think that to be right, and you the last of your race. It is best for you to tell the King.

MANUS. I lay my orders on you to tell no one at all.

NURSE. Give me leave but to *whisper* it to the Princess Nu. It's ye would be the finest two the world ever saw. You will not find her equal in all Ireland!

MANUS. I lay it as crosses and as spells on you to say no word to her or to any other that will make known my race or my name. Give me now your oath.

NURSE (*kneeling.*) I do, I do. But they will know you by your high looks.

MANUS. Did you yourself know me a while ago?

NURSE (*getting up.*) Oh, they're coming! Oh, my poor child, what way will you that never handled a spit be able to make out a dinner for the King?

MANUS. This silver whistle, that was her pipe of music, was given to me by a queen among the Sidhe that is my godmother. At the sound

of it there will come through the air any earthly thing I wish for, at my command.

NURSE. Let it be a dinner so.

MANUS. So it will come, on a green tablecloth carried by four swans as white as snow. The freshest of every meat, the oldest of every drink, nuts from the trees in Adam's Paradise!

(KING, QUEEN, PRINCESS, DALL GLIC *come in*. PRINCESS *sits on window sill*.)

QUEEN (*to KING*.) Here now, my dear. Wasn't I telling you I would take all trouble from your mind, and that I would not be without finding a cook for you?

KING. He came in a good hour. The want of a right dinner has downed kingdoms before this.

QUEEN. Travelling he is in search of service from the kings of the earth. His wages are in no way out of measure.

KING. Is he a good hand at his trade?

QUEEN. Honest he is, I believe, and ready to give a hand here and there.

KING. What way does he handle flesh, I'd wish to know? And all that comes up from the tide? Bream, now; that is a fish is very pleasant to me—stewed or fried with butter till the bones of it melt in your mouth. There is nothing in sea or strand but is the better of a quality cook—

only oysters, that are best left alone, being as they are all gravy and fat.

QUEEN. I didn't question him yet about cookery.

KING. It's seldom I met a woman with right respect for food, but for show and silly dishes and trash that would leave you in the finish as dwindled as a badger on St. Bridget's day.

QUEEN. If this youth of a young man was able to give satisfaction at the King of Sorcha's Court, I am sure that he will make a dinner to please yourself.

MANUS. I will do more than that. I will dress a dinner that will please *myself*.

PRINCESS (*clapping hands*.) Very well said!

KING. Sound out now some good dishes such as you used to be giving in Sorcha, and the Queen will put them down in a line of writing, that I can be thinking about them till such time as you will have them readied.

QUEEN. There are sheeps' trotters below; you might know some tasty way to dress them.

MANUS. I do surely. I'll put the trotters within a fowl, and the fowl within a goose, and the goose in a sucking pig, and the sucking pig in a fat lamb, and the lamb in a calf, and the calf in a Maderalla . . .

KING. What now is a Maderalla?

MANUS. He is a beast that saves the cook

trouble, swallowing all those meats one after another—in Sorcha.

KING. That should be a very pretty dish. Let you go make a start with it the way we will not be famished before nightfall. Bring him, Dall Glic, to the larder.

DALL GLIC. I'm in dread it's as good for him to stop where he is.

KING. What are you saying?

DALL GLIC. Those lads of apprentices that left nothing in it only bare hooks.

NURSE. It is the Queen would give no leave for more provision to come in, saying there was no one to prepare it.

MANUS. If that is so, I will be forced to lay my orders on the Hawk of the Grey Rock and the Brown Otter of the Stream to bring in meat at my bidding.

KING. Hurry on so.

QUEEN. I myself will go and give you instructions what way to use the kitchen.

MANUS. Not at all! What I do I'd as lief do in your own royal parlour! (*Blows whistle; two dark-skinned men come in with vessels.*) These are no messengers from a hungry place! Give me here those pots and pans!

QUEEN. What now is about to take place?

DALL GLIC. I not to be blind, I would say those to be very foreign-looking men.

KING. It would seem as if the world was grown to be very queer.

QUEEN. So it is, and the mastery being given to a cook.

MANUS. So it should be too! It is the King of Shades and Shadows would have rule over the world if it wasn't for the cooks!

KING. There's some sense in that now.

(Strange men are moving and arranging baskets and vessels.)

MANUS. There was respect for cooks in the early days of the world. What way did the Sons of Tuireann get their death but going questing after a cooking spit at the bidding of Lugh of the Long Hand! And if a spit was worthy of the death of heroes, what should the man be worth that is skilled in turning it? What is the difference between man and beast? Beast and bird devour what they find and have no power to change it. But we are Druids of those mysteries, having magic and virtue to turn hard grain to tender cakes, and the very skin of a grunting pig to crackling causing quarrels among champions, and it singing upon the coals. A cook! If I am, I am not without good generations before me! Who was the first old father of us, roasting and reddening the fruits of the earth from hard to soft, from bitter to kind, till they are fit for a lady's platter? What

is it leaves us in the hard cold of Christmas but the robbery from earth of warmth for the kitchen fire of (*takes off cap*) the first and foremost of all master cooks—the Sun!

PRINCESS. You are surely not ashamed of your trade!

MANUS. To work now, to work. I'll engage to turn out a dinner fit for Pharoah of Egypt or Pharamond King of the Franks! Here, Queen, is a silver-breasted phoenix—draw out the feathers—they are pure silver—fair and clean. (QUEEN *plucks eagerly.*) King, take your golden sceptre and stir this pot. (*Gives him one.*)

KING (*interested.*) What now is in it?

MANUS. A broth that will rise over the side, and be consumed and spilt if you stop stirring it for one minute only! (KING *stirs furiously.*) Princess (*she is looking on and he goes over to her*), there are honey cakes to roll out, but I will not ask you to do it in dread that you might spoil the whiteness

PRINCESS. I have no mind to do it.

MANUS. Of the flour!

PRINCESS. Give them here. (*Rolls them out indignantly.*)

MANUS. That is right. Take care, King, would the froth swell over the brim.

PRINCESS. It seems to me you are doing but little yourself.

MANUS. I will turn now and boil

these eggs. (*Takes some on a plate; they roll off.*)

PRINCESS. You have broken them.

MANUS (*disconcerted.*) It was to show you a good trick, how to make them sit up on the narrow end.

PRINCESS. That is an old trick in the world.

MANUS. Every trick is an old one, but with a change of players, a change of dress, it comes out as new as before. Princess (*speaks low*), I have a message to give you and a pardon to ask.

PRINCESS. Give me out the message.

MANUS. Take courage and keep courage through this day. Do not let your heart fail. There is help beside you.

PRINCESS. It has been a troublesome day indeed. But there is a worse one and a great danger before me in the far away.

MANUS. That danger will come to-day, the message said in the dream. Princess, I have a pardon to ask you. I have been playing vanities. I think I have wronged you doing this. It was surely through no want of respect.

GATEKEEPER (*coming in.*) There is word come from Ballyvelehan there is a coach and horses facing for this place over from Oughtmana.

QUEEN. Who would that be?

GATEKEEPER. Up on the hill a woman was, brought word it must be some high gentleman.

She could see all colours in the coach, and flowers on the horses' heads. (*Goes out.*)

DALL GLIC. That is good hearing. I was in dread some man we would have no welcome for would be the first to come in this day.

QUEEN. Not a fear of it. I had orders given to the Gateman who he would and would not keep out. I did that the very minute after the King making his proclamation and his law.

KING. Pup, pup. You need not be drawing that down.

QUEEN. It is well you have myself to care you and to turn all to good. I gave orders to the Gateman, I say, no one to be let in to the door unless carriage company, no other ones, even if they would wipe their feet upon the mat. I notched that in his mind, telling him the King was after promising the Princess Nu in marriage to the first man that would come into the house.

MANUS. The King gave out that word?

QUEEN. I am after saying that he did.

DALL GLIC. Come along, lad. Don't be putting ears on yourself.

MANUS. I ask the King did he give out that promise as the Queen says?

KING. I have but a poor memory.

NURSE. The King did say it within the hour, and swore to it by the oath of his people, taking contracts of the sun and moon of the air!

DALL GLIC. What is it to you if he did? Come on, now.

MANUS. No. This a matter that concerns myself.

QUEEN. How do you make that out?

MANUS. You, that called me in, know well that I was the first to come into the house.

QUEEN. Ha, ha! You have the impudence! It is a *man* the King said. He was not talking about cooks.

MANUS (*to the KING.*) I am before you as a serving lad, and you are a King in Ireland. Because you are a King and I your hired servant you will not refuse me justice. You gave your word.

KING. If I did it was in haste and in vexation, and striving to save her from destruction.

MANUS. I call you to keep to your word and to give your daughter to no other one.

QUEEN. Speak out now, Dall Glic, and give your opinion and your advice.

DALL GLIC. I would say that this lad going away would be no great loss.

MANUS. I did not ask such a thing, but as it has come to me I will hold to my right.

QUEEN. It would be right to throw him to the hounds in the kennel!

MANUS (*to KING.*) I leave it to the judgment of your blind wise man.

QUEEN (*to DALL GLIC.*) Take care would you offend myself or the King!

MANUS. I put it on you to split justice as it is measured outside the world.

DALL GLIC. It is hard for me to speak. He has laid it hard on me. My good eye may go asleep, but my blind eye never sleeps. In the place where it is waking, an honourable man, king or beggar, is held to his word.

KING. Is it that I must give my daughter to a lad that owns neither clod nor furrow? Whose estate is but a shovel for the ashes and a tongs for the red coals.

QUEEN. It is likely he is urged by the sting of greed—it is but riches he is looking for.

KING. I will not begrudge him his own asking of silver and of gold!

MANUS. Throw it out to the beggars on the road! I would not take a copper half-penny! I'll take nothing but what has come to me from your own word! (*KING bows his head.*)

PRINCESS (*coming forward.*) Then this battle is not between you and an old king that is feeble, but between yourself and myself.

MANUS. I am sorry, Princess, if it must be a battle.

PRINCESS. You can never bring me away against my will.

MANUS. I said no word of doing that.

PRINCESS. You think, so, I will go with you of myself? The day I will do that will be the day you will empty the ocean!

MANUS. I will not wait longer than to day.

PRINCESS. Many a man waited seven years for a king's daughter!

MANUS. And another seven—and seven generations of hags. But that is not my nature. I will not kneel to any woman, high or low, or crave kindness that she cannot give.

PRINCESS. Then I can go free!

MANUS. For this day I take you in my charge. I cross and claim you to myself, unless a better man will come.

PRINCESS. I would think it easier to find a better man than one that would be worse to me!

MANUS. If one should come that you think to be a better man, I will give you your own way.

PRINCESS. It is you being in the world at all that is my grief!

MANUS. Time makes all things clear. You did not go far out in the world yet, my poor little Princess.

PRINCESS. I would be well pleased to drive you out through the same world!

MANUS. With or without your goodwill, I will not go out of this place till I have carried out the business I came to do.

DALL GLIC. Is it the falling of hailstones I hear or the rumbling of thunder, or is it the trots of horses upon the road?

QUEEN (*looking out.*) It is the big man that is coming—Prince or Lord or whoever he may be. (*To DALL GLIC.*) Go now to the door to welcome him. This is some man worth while. (*To MANUS.*) Let you get out of this.

MANUS. No, whoever he is I'll stop and face him. Let him know we are players in the one game!

KING. And what sort of a fool will you make of me, to have given in to take the like of you for a son-in-law? They will be putting ridicule on me in the songs.

QUEEN. If he must stop here we might put some face on him. . . . If I had but a decent suit. . . . Give me your cloak, Dall Glic. (*He gives it.*) Here now . . . (*to MANUS.*) Put this around you. . . . (*MANUS takes it awkwardly.*) It will cover up your kitchen suit.

MANUS. Is it this way?

QUEEN. You have no right handling of it—stupid clown! This way!

MANUS (*flinging it off.*) No, I'll change no more suits! It is time for me to stop fooling and give you what you did not ask yet, my name. I will tell out all the truth.

GATEKEEPER (*at door.*) The King of Sorcha!
(*TAIG comes in.*)

KING AND QUEEN. The King of Sorchal!
(*They rush forward to greet him.*)

NURSE (*to MANUS.*) Did ever anyone hear the like!

MANUS. It seems as if there will be a judgment between the man and the clothes!

QUEEN (*to TAIG.*) There is someone here that you know, King. This young man is giving out that he was your cook.

TAIG. He was not. I never laid an eye on him till this minute.

QUEEN. I was sure he was nothing but a liar when he said he would tell out the truth! Now, King, will you turn him out the door?

KING. And what about the great dinner he has me promised?

MANUS. Be easy, King. Whether or no you keep your word to me I'll hold to mine! (*Blows whistle.*) In with the dishes! Take your places! Let the music play out!

(*Music plays, the strange men wheel in tables and dishes.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE : *Same. Table cleared of all but vessels of fruit, cocoa-nuts, etc. QUEEN and TAIG sitting in front, NURSE and DALL GLIC standing in background.*

QUEEN. Now, King, the dinner being at an end, and the music, we have time and quiet to be talking.

TAIG. It is with the King's daughter I am come to talk.

QUEEN. Go, Dall Glic, call the Princess. She will be here on the minute, but it is best for you to tell me out if it is to ask her in marriage you are come.

TAIG. It is so, where I was after being told she would be given as a wife to the first man that would come into the house.

QUEEN. And who in the world wide gave that out?

TAIG. It was the Gateman said it to a hawker bringing lobsters from the strand, and that got no leave to cross the threshold by reason of the oath given out by the King. The half of the kingdom she will get, they were telling me, and the king living, and the whole of it after he will be dead.

NURSE. There did another come in before you. Let me tell you that much!

TAIG. There did not. The lobster man that set a watch upon the door.

QUEEN. A great honour you did us coming asking for her, and you being King of Sorcha!

TAIG. Look at my ring and my crown. They will bear witness that I am. And my kind coat of cotton and my golden shirt! And under that again there's a stiff pocket (*slaps it.*) Is there e'er a looking-glass in any place? (*Gets up.*)

DALL GLIC. There is the shining silver basin of the swans in the garden without.

TAIG. That will do. I would wish to look tasty when I come looking for a lady of a wife. (*He and DALL GLIC go outside window but in sight.*)

(*PRINCESS comes in very proud and sad.*)

QUEEN. You should be proud this day, Nuala, and so grand a man coming asking you in marriage as the King of Sorcha.

NURSE. Grand, indeed! As grand as hands and pins can make him.

PRINCESS. Are you not satisfied to have urged me to one man and promised me to another since sunrise?

QUEEN. What way could I know there was this match on the way, and a better match beyond measure? This is no black stranger going

the road, but a man having a copper crown over his gateway and a silver crown over his palace door! I tell you he has means to hang a pearl of gold upon every rib of your hair! There is no one ahead of him in all Ireland, with his chain and his ring and his suit of the dearest silk!

PRINCESS. If it was a suit I was to wed with he might do well enough.

QUEEN. Equal in blood to ourselves! Brought up to good behaviour and courage and mannerly ways.

PRINCESS. In my opinion he is 'not.

QUEEN. You are talking foolishness. A King of Sorchá must be mannerly, seeing it is he himself sets the tune for manners.

PRINCESS. He gave out a laugh when old Michelin slipped on the threshold. He kicked at the dog under the table that came looking for bones.

QUEEN. I tell you what might be ugly behaviour in a common man is suitable and right in a king. But you are so hard to please and so pettish, I am seven times tired of yourself and your ways.

PRINCESS. If no one could force me to give in to the man that made a claim to me to-day, according to my father's bond, that bond is there yet to protect me from any other one.

QUEEN. Leave me alone! Myself and the Dall Glic will take means to rid you of that lad from the oven. I'll send in now to you the King of Sorcha. Let you show civility to him, and the wedding-day will be to-morrow.

PRINCESS. I will not see him, I will have nothing to do with him; I tell you if he had the rents of the whole world I would not go with him by day or by night, on foot or on horseback, in light or in darkness, in company or alone!

(QUEEN *has gone while she cries this out.*)

NURSE. The luck of the seven Saturdays on himself and on the Queen!

PRINCESS. Oh, Muime, do not let him come near me! Have you no way to help me?

NURSE. It's myself that could help you if I was not under bonds not to speak!

PRINCESS. What is it you know? Why won't you say one word?

NURSE. He put me under spells. There now, my tongue turned with the word to be dumb.

TAIG (*at the window.*) Not a fear of me, Queen. It won't be long till I bring the Princess around.

PRINCESS. I will not stay! Keep him here till I will hide myself out of sight! (*Goes.*)

TAIG (*coming in.*) They told me the Princess was in it.

NURSE. She has good sense, she is in some other place.

TAIG (*sitting down.*) Go call her to me.

NURSE. Who is it I will call her for?

TAIG. For myself. You know who I am.

NURSE. My grief that I do not!

TAIG. I am the King of Sorcha.

NURSE. If you say that lie again there will blisters rise up on your face.

TAIG. Take care what you are saying, you hag!

NURSE. I know well what I am saying. I have good judgment between the noble and the mean blood of the world.

TAIG. The Kings of Sorcha have high, noble blood.

NURSE. If they have, there is not so much of it in you as would redden a rib of scutch-grass.

TAIG. You are crazed with folly and age.

NURSE. No, but I have my wits good enough. You to be as slippery as a living eel, I'll get satisfaction on you yet! I'll show out who you are!

TAIG. Who am I so?

NURSE. That is what I have to get knowledge of, if I must go ask it at the mouth of cold hell!

TAIG. Do your best! I dare you!

NURSE. I will save my darling from you as

sure as there's rocks on the strand! A girl that refused sons of the kings of the world!

TAIG. And I will drag your darling from you as sure as there's foxes in Oughtmana!

NURSE. Oughtmana . . . Is that now your living place?

TAIG. It is not. . . . I told you I came from the far-off kingdom of Sorchá. Look at my cloak that has on it the sign of the risen sun!

NURSE. Cloaks and suits and fringes. You have a great deal of talk of them. . . . Have you e'er a needle around you, or a shears?

TAIG (*his hand goes to breast of coat, but he withdraws it quickly.*) Here . . . no . . . What are you talking about? I know nothing at all of such things.

NURSE. In my opinion you do. Hearken now. I know where is the real King of Sorchá!

TAIG. Bring him before me now till I'll down him!

NURSE. Say that the time you will come face to face with him! Well, I'm under bonds to tell out nothing about him, but I have liberty to make known all I will find out about yourself.

TAIG. Hurry on so. Little I'll care when once I'm wed with the King's daughter!

NURSE. That will never be!

TAIG. The Queen is befriending me and in dread of losing me. I will threaten her if there

is any delay I'll go look for another girl of a wife.

NURSE. I myself will make no delay. I'll have my story and my testimony before the white dawn of the morrow.

TAIG. Do so and welcome! Before the yellow light of this evening I'll be the King's son-in-law! Bring your news, then, and little thanks you'll get for it! The King and Queen must keep up my name then for their own credit's sake. (*Makes a face at her as KING comes in with DALL GLIC, and servants with cushions. NURSE goes out, shaking her fist.*) (*Rises.*) I was just asking to see you, King, to say there is hurry on me . . .

KING (*sitting down on window seat while SERVANT arranges cushions about him.*) Keep your business a while. It's a poor thing to be going through business the very minute the dinner is ended.

TAIG. I wouldn't but that it is pressing.

KING. Go now to the Queen, in her parlour, and be chatting and whistling to the birds. I give you my word since I rose up from the table I am going here and there, up and down, craving and striving to find a place where I'll get leave to lay my head on the cushions for one little minute.

(*TAIG goes reluctantly.*)

DALL GLIC (*taking cushions from servants.*)
Let you go now and leave the King to his rest.
(*They go out.*)

KING. I don't know in the world why anyone would consent to be a king, and never to be left to himself, but to be worried and wearied and interfered with from dark to daybreak and from morning to the fall of night.

DALL GLIC. I will be going out now. I have but one word only to say . . .

KING. Let it be a short word! I would be better pleased to hear the sound of breezes in the sycamores, and the humming of bees in the hive and the crooning and sleepy sounds of the sea!

DALL GLIC. There is one thing only could cause me to annoy you.

KING. It should be a queer big thing that wouldn't wait till I have my rest taken.

DALL GLIC. So it is a big matter, and a weighty one.

KING. Not to be left in quiet and all I am after using! Food that was easy to eat! Drink that was easy to drink! That's the dinner that *was* a dinner. That cook now is a wonder!

DALL GLIC. That is now the very one I am wishful to speak about.

KING. I give you my word, I'd sooner have one goose dressed by him than seven dressed by any other one!

DALL GLIC. The Queen that was urging me for to put my mind to make out some way to get quit of him.

KING. Isn't it a hard thing the very minute I find a lad can dress a dinner to my liking, I must be made an attack on to get quit of him?

DALL GLIC. It is on the head of the Princess Nu.

KING. Tell me this, Dall Glic. Supposing, now, he was . . . in spite of me . . . to wed with her . . . against my will . . . and it might be unknownst to me . . .

DALL GLIC. Such a thing must not happen.

KING. To be sure, it must not happen. Why would it happen? But supposing—I only said supposing it did. Would you say would that lad grow too high in himself to go into the kitchen . . . it might be only an odd time . . . to oblige me . . . and dress a dinner the same as he did to-day?

DALL GLIC. I am sure and certain that he would not. It is the way it is with the common sort, the lower orders. He'd be asking to sit on a chair at his ease and to leave his hand idle till he'd grow to be bulky and wishful for sleep.

KING. That is a pity, a great pity, and a great loss to the world. A big misfortune he to have got it in his head to take a liking to the girl. I tell you he was a great lad behind the saucepans!

DALL GLIC. Since he did get it in his head, it is what we have to do now, to make an end of him.

KING. To gaol him now, and settle up ovens and spits and all sorts in the cell, wouldn't he, to shorten the day, be apt to start cooking?

DALL GLIC. In my belief he will do nothing at all, but to hold you to the promise you made, and to force you to send away the King of Sorchá.

KING. To have the misfortune of a cook for a son-in-law, and without the good luck of profiting by what he can do in his trade! That is a hard thing for a father to put up with, let alone a king!

DALL GLIC. If you will but listen to the advice I have to give . . .

KING. I know it without you telling me. You are asking me to make away with the lad! And who knows but the girl might turn on me after, women are so queer, and say I had a right to have asked leave from herself?

DALL GLIC. There will no one suspect you of doing it, and you to take my plan. Bid them heat the big oven outside on the lawn that is for roasting a bullock in its full bulk.

KING. Don't be talking of roasted meat! I think I can eat no more for a twelvemonth!

DALL GLIC. There will be nothing roasted that any person will have occasion to eat. When

the oven door will be open, give orders to your bullies and your foot-soldiers to give a tip to him that will push him in. When evening comes, news will go out that he left the meat to burn and made off on his rambles, and no more about him.

KING. What way can I send orders when I'm near crazed in my wits with the want of rest. A little minute of sleep might soothe and settle my brain. (*Lies down.*)

DALL GLIC. The least little word to give leave . . . or a sign . . . such as to nod the head.

KING. I give you my word, my head is tired nodding! Be off now and close the door after you and give out that anyone that comes to this side of the house at all in the next half-hour, his neck will be on the block before morning!

DALL GLIC (*hurriedly.*) I'm going! I'm going. (*Goes.*)

KING (*locking door and drawing window curtains.*) That you may never come back till I ask you! (*Lies down and settles himself on pillows.*) I'll be lying here in my lone listening to the pigeons seeking their meal. "Coo-coo," they're saying, "Coo-coo." (*Closes eyes.*)

NURSE (*at door.*) Who is it locked the door? (*Shakes it.*) Who is it is in it? What is going on within? Is it that some bad work is after being done in this place? Hi! Hi! Hi!

KING (*sitting up.*) Get away out of that, you torment of a nurse! Be off before I'll have the life of you!

NURSE. The Lord be praised, it is the King's own voice! There's time yet!

KING. There's time, is there? There's time for everyone to give out their chat and their gab, and to do their business and take their ease and have a comfortable life, only the King! The beasts of the field have leave to lay themselves down in the meadow and to stretch their limbs on the green grass in the heat of the day, without being pestered and plagued and tormented and called to and wakened and worried, till a man is no less than wore out!

NURSE. Up or down, Ill say what I have to say; if it costs me my life. It is that I have to tell you of a plot that is made and a plan!

KING. I won't listen! I heard enough of plots and plans within the last three minutes!

NURSE. You didn't hear this one. No one knows of it only myself.

KING. I was told it by the Dall Glic.

NURSE. You were not! I am only after making it out on the moment!

KING. A plot against the lad of the sauce-pans?

NURSE. That's it! That's it! Open now the door!

KING (*putting a cushion over each ear and settling himself to sleep.*) Tell away and welcome! (*Shuts eyes.*)

NURSE. That's right! You're listening. Give heed now. That schemer came a while ago letting on to be the King of Sorcha is no such thing! What do you say? . . . Maybe you knew it before? I wonder the Dall Glic not to have seen that for himself with his one eye. . . . Maybe you don't believe it? Well, I'll tell it out and prove it. I have got sure word by running messenger that came cross-cutting over the ridge of the hill. . . . That carrion that came in a coach, pressing to bring away the Princess before nightfall, giving himself out to be some great one, is no other than Taig the Tailor, that should be called Taig the Twister, down from his mother's house from Oughtmana, that stole grand clothes which were left in the mother's charge, he being out at the time cutting cloth and shaping lies, and has himself dressed out in them the way you'd take him to be King! (KING *has slumbered peacefully all through.*) Now, what do you say? Now, will you open the door?

QUEEN (*outside.*) What call have you to shouting and disturbing the King?

NURSE. I have good right and good reason to disturb him!

QUEEN. Go away and let me open the door.

NURSE. I will go and welcome now; I have told out my whole story to the King.

QUEEN (*shaking door.*) Open the door, my dear! It is I myself that is here! (KING *looks up, listens, shakes his head and sinks back.*) Are you there at all, or what is it ails you?

NURSE. He is there, and is after conversing with myself.

QUEEN (*shaking again.*) Let me in, my dear King! Open! Open! Open! unless that the falling sickness is come upon you, or that you are maybe lying dead upon the floor!

NURSE. Not a dead in the world.

QUEEN. Go, Nurse, I tell you, bring the smith from the anvil till he will break asunder the lock of the door!

(KING, *annoyed, waddles to door and opens it suddenly.* QUEEN *stumbles in.*)

KING. What at all has taken place that you come bawling and calling and disturbing my rest?

QUEEN. Oh! Are you sound and well? I was in dread there did something come upon you, when you gave no answer at all.

KING. Am I bound to answer every call and clamour the same as a hall-porter at the door?

QUEEN. It is business that cannot wait. Here now is a request I have written to the bully of the King of Alban, bidding him to strike the

head off whatever man will put the letter in his hand. Write your name and sign to it, in three royal words.

KING. I wouldn't sign a letter out of my right hour if it was to make the rivers run gold. There is nothing comes of signing letters but more trouble in the end.

QUEEN. Give me, so, to bind it a drop of your own blood as a token and a seal. You will not refuse, and I telling you the messenger will go with it, and that will lose his head through it, is no less than that troublesome cook!

KING (*with a roar.*) Anyone to say that word again I will not leave a head on any neck in the kingdom! I declare on my oath it would be best for me take the world for my pillow, and put that lad upon the throne!

(QUEEN *goes back frightened to door.*)

GATEMAN (*coming in.*) There is a man coming in that will take no denial. It is Fintan the Astrologer.

(FINTAN *enters with DALL GLIC, NURSE, PRINCESS, TAIG, MANUS and PRINCE OF THE MARSHES crowding after him.*)

KING. Another disturbance! The whole world would seem to be on the move!

QUEEN. Fintan! What brings him here again?

FINTAN. A great deceit! A terrible deception!

KING. What at all is it?

FINTAN. Long and all as I'm in the world, such a thing never happened in my lifetime!

QUEEN. What is it has happened?

FINTAN. It is not any fault of myself or any miscounting of my own! I am certain sure of that much. Is it that the stars of heaven are gone astray, they that are all one with a clock—unless it might be on a stormy night when they are wild-looking around the moon.

KING. Go on with your story and stop your raving.

FINTAN. The first time ever I came to this place I made a prophecy.

DALL GLIC. You did, about the child was in the cradle.

FINTAN. And that was but new in the world. It is what I said, that she was born under a certain star, and that in a score of years all but two, whatever acting was going on in that star at the time she was born, she would get her crosses in the same way.

DALL GLIC. The cross you foretold to her was to be ate by a Dragon. You laid down it would come upon a twelvemonth from this very day.

FINTAN. That's it. That was according to my reckoning. There was no mistake in that.

'And I thought better of the Seven Stars than they to make a fool of me, after all the respect I had showed them, giving my life to watching themselves and the plans they have laid down for men and for mortals.

KING. It seems as if I myself was the best prophet and that there is no Dragon at all.

FINTAN. What a bad opinion you have of me that I would be so far out as that! It would be a deception and a disappointment out of measure, there to come no Dragon, and I after foretelling and prophesying him.

KING. Troth, it would be no disappointment at all to ourselves.

FINTAN. It would be better, I tell you, a score of king's daughters to be ate and devoured, than the high stars in their courses to be proved wrong. But it must be right, it surely must be right. I gave the prophecy according to her birth hour, that was one hour before the falling back of the sun.

DALL GLIC. It was not, but an hour before the rising of the sun.

FINTAN. Not at all! It was the Nurse herself told me it was at evening she was born.

QUEEN. There is the Nurse now. Let you ask her account.

FINTAN (*to NURSE.*) It was yourself laid down it was evening!

NURSE. Sure I wasn't in the place at all till Samhuin time, when she was near three months in the world.

FINTAN. Then it was some other hag the very spit of you! I wish she didn't tell a lie.

NURSE. Sure that one was banished out of this on the head of telling lies. An hour ere sunrise, and before the crowing of the cocks. The Dall Glic will tell you that much.

DALL GLIC. That is so. I have it marked upon the genealogies in the chest.

FINTAN. That is great news! It was a heavy wrong was done me! It had me greatly upset. Twelve hours out in laying down the birth-time! That clears the character of myself and of the carwheel of the stars. I knew I could make no mistake in my office and in my billet!

KING. Will you stop praising yourself and give out some sense?

FINTAN. Knowledge is surely the greatest thing in the world! And truth! Twelve hours with the planets is equal to twelve months on earth. I am well satisfied now.

QUEEN. So the Dragon is not coming, and the girl is in no danger at all?

FINTAN. Not coming! Heaven help your poor head! Didn't I get word within the last half-hour he is after leaving his den in the Kingdoms of the Cold, and is at this minute ploughing his way to Ireland, the same as I

foretold him, but that I made a miscount of a year?

NURSE (*putting her arm round PRINCESS.*)
Och! do not listen or give heed to him at all!

QUEEN. When is he coming so?

FINTAN. Amn't I tired telling you this day in the place of this day twelvemonth. But as to the minute, there's too much lies in this place for me to be rightly sure.

KING. The curse of the seven elements upon him!

FINTAN. Little he'll care for your cursing. The whole world wouldn't stop him coming to your own grand gate.

PRINCESS (*coming forward.*) Then I am to die to-night?

FINTAN. You are, without he will be turned back by someone having a stronger star than your own, and I know of no star is better, unless it might be the sun.

QUEEN. If you had minded me, and given in to ring the wedding bells, you would be safe out of this before now.

FINTAN. That Dragon not to find her before him, he will ravage and destroy the whole district with the poisonous spittle of his jaw, till the want will be so great the father will disown his son and will not let him in the door. Well, good-bye to ye! Ye'll maybe believe me to have foreknowledge another time, and I

proved to be right. I have knocked great comfort out of that! (*Goes.*)

KING. Oh, my poor child! My poor little Nu! I thought it never would come to pass, I to be sending you to the slaughter. And I too bulky to go out and face him, having led an easy life!

PRINCESS. Do not be fretting.

KING. The world is gone to and fro! I'll never ask satisfaction again either in bed or board, but to be wasting away with water-cresses and rising up of a morning before the sun rises in Babylon! (*Weeps.*) Oh, we might make out a way to baffle him yet! Is there no meal will serve him only flesh and blood? Try him with Grecian wine, and with what was left of the big dinner a while ago!

GATEMAN (*coming in.*) There is some strange thing in the ocean from Aran out. At first it was but like a bird's shadow on the sea, and now you would nearly say it to be the big island would have left its moorings, and it steering its course towards Aughanish!

DALL GLIC. I'm in dread it should be the Dragon that has cleared the ocean at a leap!

KING (*holding* PRINCESS.) I will not give you up! Let him devour myself along with you!

DALL GLIC (*to* PRINCESS.) It is best for me to put you in a hiding-hole under the ground,

that has seven locked doors and seven locks on the farthest door. It might fail him to make you out.

NURSE. Oh, it would be hard for her to go where she cannot hear the voice of a friend or see the light of day!

PRINCESS. Would you wish me to save myself and let all the district perish? You heard what Fintan said. It is not right for destruction to be put on a whole province, and the women and the children that I know.

QUEEN. There is maybe time yet for you to wed.

PRINCESS. So long as I am living I have a choice. I will not be saved in that way. It is alone I will be in my death.

MANUS (*coming to KING.*) I am going out from you, King. I might not be coming in to you again. I would wish to set you free from the promise you made me a while ago, and the bond.

KING. What does it signify now? What does anything signify, and the world turning here and there!

MANUS. And another thing. I would wish to ask pardon of the King's daughter. I ought not to have laid any claim to her, being a stranger in this place and without treasure or attendance. And yet. . . . and yet . . . (*stoops and kisses hem of her dress*), she was

dear to me. It is a man who never may look on her again is saying that. (*Turns to door.*)

TAIG. He is going to run from the Dragon! It is kind father for a scullion to be timid!

QUEEN. It is in his blood. He is maybe not to blame for what is according to his nature.

MANUS. That is so. I am doing what is according to my nature. (*Goes, NURSE goes after him.*)

QUEEN (*to DALL GLIC.*) Go throw a dish-cloth after him that the little lads may be mocking him along the road!

DALL GLIC. I will not. I have meddled enough at your bidding. I am done with living under dread. Let you blind me entirely! I am free of you. It might be best for me the two eyes to be withered, and I seeing nothing but the ever-living laws!

PRINCE OF MARSHES (*coming to PRINCESS.*) It is my grief that with all the teachers I had there was not one to learn me the handling of weapons or of arms. But for all that I will not run away, but will strive to strike one blow in your defence against that wicked beast.

PRINCESS. It is a good friend that would rid us of him. But it grieves me that you should go into such danger.

PRINCE OF MARSHES (*to DALL GLIC.*) Give me some sword or casting spears. (*DALL GLIC gives him spears.*)

PRINCESS. I am sorry I made fun of you a while ago. I think you are a good kind man.

PRINCE OF MARSHES (*kissing her hand.*) Having that word of praise I will bring a good heart into the fight. (*Goes.*)

(*TAIG is slipping out after him.*)

QUEEN. See now the King of Sorcha slipping away into the fight. Stop here now! (*Pulls him back.*) You have a life that is precious to many besides yourself. Do not go without being well armed—and with a troop of good fighting men at your back.

TAIG. I am greatly obliged to you. I think I'll be best with myself.

QUEEN. You have no suit of armour upon you.

TAIG. That is what I was thinking.

QUEEN. Here anyway is a sword.

TAIG (*taking it.*) That's a nice belt now. Well worked, silver thread and gold.

QUEEN. The King's own guard will go out with you.

TAIG. I wouldn't ask one of them! What would you think of me wanting help! A Dragon! Little I'd think of him. I'll knock the life out of him! I'll give him cruelty!

QUEEN. You have great courage indeed!

TAIG. I'll cut him crossways and lengthways the same as a yard of frieze! I'll make garters

of his body! I'll smooth him with a smoothing iron! Not a fear of me! I never lost a bet yet that I wasn't able to pay it!

GATEMAN (*as he rushes in, TAIG slips away.*)
The Dragon! The Dragon! I seen it coming and its mouth open and a fiery flame from it! And nine miles of the sea is dry with all it drank of it! The whole country is gathering the same as of a fair day for to see him devour the Princess.

(PRINCESS *trembles and sinks into a chair.*
KING, QUEEN and DALL GLIC *look from window. They turn to her as they speak.*)

QUEEN. There is a terrible splashing in the sea! It is like as if the Dragon's tail had beaten it into suds of soap!

DALL GLIC. He is near as big as a whale!

KING. He is, and bigger!

QUEEN. I see him! I see him! He would seem to have seven heads!

DALL GLIC. I see but one.

QUEEN. You would see more if you had your two eyes! He has six heads at the least!

KING. He has but one. He is twisting and turning it around.

DALL GLIC. He is coming up towards the flaggy shore!

KING. I hear him! He is snoring like a flock of pigs!

QUEEN. He is rearing his head in the air! He has teeth as long as a tongs!

DALL GLIC. No, but his tail he is rearing up! It would take a ladder forty feet long to get to the tip of it!

QUEEN. There is the King of Sorcha going out the gate for to make an end of him.

DALL GLIC. So he is, too. That is great bravery.

KING. He is going to one side. He is come to a stop.

DALL GLIC. It seems to me he is ready to fall in his standing. He is gone into a little thicket of furze. He is not coming out, but is lying crouched up in it the same as a hare in a tuft. I can see his shoulders narrowed up.

QUEEN. He maybe got a weakness.

KING. He did, maybe, of courage. Shaking and shivering, he is like a hen in thunder. In my opinion, he is hiding from the fight.

QUEEN. There is the Prince of the Marshes going out now, and his coach after him! And his two Aunts sitting in it and screeching to him not to run into danger!

KING. He will not do much. He has not pith or power to handle arms. That sort brings a bad name on kings.

DALL GLIC. He is gone away from the coach. He is facing to the flaggy shore!

QUEEN. Oh, the Dragon has put up his head and is spitting at him!

KING. He has cast a spear into its jaw! Good man!

(PRINCESS *goes over to window.*)

DALL GLIC. He is casting another! His hand shook . . . it did not go straight. He is gone on again! He has cast another spear! It should hit the beast . . . it let a roar!

PRINCESS. Good little Prince! What way is the battle now?

DALL GLIC. It will kill him with its fiery breath! He is running now he is stumbling the Dragon is after him! He is up again! The two Aunts have pushed him into the coach and have closed the iron door.

KING. It will fail the beast to swallow him coach and all. It is gone back to refresh itself in the sea. You can hear it puffing and plunging!

QUEEN. There is nothing to stop it now. (*To PRINCESS.*) If you have e'er a prayer, now is the time to say it.

DALL GLIC. Stop a minute . . . there is another champion going out.

KING. A man wearing a saffron suit . . . who is he at all? He has the look of one used to giving orders.

PRINCESS (*looking out.*) Oh! he is but going to his death. It would be better for me to throw myself into the tide and make an end of it. (*Is rushing to door.*)

KING (*holding her.*) He is drawing his sword. Himself and the Dragon are thrusting at one another on the flags!

PRINCESS. Oh, close the curtains! Shut out the sound of the battle.

(DALL GLIC *closes curtains.*)

KING. Strike up now a tune of music that will deafen the sound!

(*Orchestra plays. PRINCESS is kneeling by KING. Music changes from discord to victory. Two AUNTS and GATEMAN rush in. Noise of cheering heard without as the GATEMAN silences music.*)

GATEMAN. Great news and wonderful news and a great story!

FIRST AUNT. The fight is ended!

SECOND AUNT. The Dragon is brought to his last goal!

GATEMAN. That young fighting man that has him flogged! Made at him like a wave breaking on the strand! They crashed at one another like two days of judgment! Like the battle of the cold with the heat!

FIRST AUNT. You'd say he was going through dragons all his life!

SECOND AUNT. It can hardly put a stir out of itself!

GATEMAN. That champion has it baffled and mastered! It is after being chased over seven acres of ground!

FIRST AUNT. Drove it to its knees on the flaggy shore and made an end of it!

KING. God bless that man to-day and to-morrow!

SECOND AUNT. He has put it in a way it will eat no more kings' daughters!

PRINCESS. And the stranger that mastered it—is he safe?

FIRST AUNT. What signifies if he is or is not, so long as we have our own young prince to bring home!

GATEKEEPER. He is not safe. No sooner had he the beast killed and conquered than he fell dead, and the life went out of him.

PRINCESS. Oh, that is not right! He to be dead and I living after him!

KING. He was surely noble and high-blooded. There are some that will be sorry for his death.

PRINCESS. And who should be more sorry than I myself am sorry? Who should keen him unless myself? There is a man that gave his life for me, and he young and all his days before

him, and shut his eyes on the white world for my sake!

QUEEN. Indeed he was a man you might have been content to wed with, hard and all as you are to please.

PRINCESS. I never will wed with any man so long as my life will last, that was bought for me with a life was more worthy by far than my own! He is gone out of my reach; let him wait for me to give him my thanks on the other side. Bring me now his sword and his shield till I will put them before me and cry my eyes down with grief!

GATEMAN. Here is his cap for you, anyway, and his cleaver and his bunch of skivers. For the champion you are crying was no other than that lad of a cook!

QUEEN. That is not true! It is not possible!

GATEMAN. Sure I seen him myself going out the gate a while ago. He put off his cook's apparel and threw it along with these behind the turfstack. I gathered them up presently and I coming in the door.

KING. The world is gone beyond me entirely! But what I was saying all through, there was something beyond the common in that boy!

QUEEN (*to PRINCESS, who is clinging to chair.*) Let you be comforted now, knowing he cannot come back to lay claim to you in marriage, as it is likely he would, and he living.

PRINCESS. It is he saved me after my unkindness! Oh, I am ashamed ashamed!

QUEEN. It is a queer thing a king's daughter to be crying after a man used to twisting the spit in place of weapons, and over skivers in the place of a sword!

PRINCESS (*gropes and totters.*) What has happened? There is something gone astray! I have no respect for myself. . . . I cannot live! I am ashamed? Where is Nurse? Muime! Come to me Muime! . . . My grief! The man that died for me, whether he is of the noble or the simple of the world, it is to him I have given the love of my soul! (DALL GLIC *supports her and lays her on window seat.*)

NURSE (*rushing in.*) What is it, honey? What at all are they after doing to you?

QUEEN. Throw over her a skillet of water. She is gone into a faint.

DALL GLIC (*who is bending over her.*) She is in no faint. She is gone out.

NURSE. Oh, my child and my darling! What call had I to leave you among them at all?

KING. Raise her up. It is impossible she can be gone.

DALL GLIC. Gone out and spent, as sudden as a candle in a blast of wind.

KING. Who would think grief would do

away with her so sudden, there to be seven of the like of him dead?

NURSE (*rises.*) What did you do to her at all, at all? Or was it through the fright and terror of the beast?

QUEEN. She died of the heartbreak, being told that the strange champion that had put down the Dragon was killed dead.

NURSE. Killed, is it? Who now put that lie out of his mouth? (*Shouts in her ear.*) What would ail him to be dead? It is myself can tell you the true story. No man in Ireland ever was half as good as him! It was himself mastered the beast and dragged the heart out of him and forced down a squirrel's heart in its place, and slapped a bridle on him. And he himself did but stagger and go to his knees in the heat and drunkenness of the battle, and rose up after as good as ever he was! It is out putting ointments on him that I was up to this, and healing up his cuts and his wounds! Oh, what ails you, honey, that you will not waken?

QUEEN. She thought it to be a champion and a high up man that had died for her sake. It is what broke her down in the latter end, hearing him to be no big man at all, but a clown!

NURSE. Oh, my darling! And I not here to tell you! You are a motherless child, and the curse of your mother will be on me! It was no

clown fought for you, but a king, having generations of kings behind him, the young King of Sorcha, Manus, son of Solas son of Lugh.

KING. I would believe that now sooner than many a thing I would hear.

NURSE (*keening.*) Oh, my child, and my share! I thought it was you would be closing my eyes, and now I am closing your own! You to be brought away in your young youth! Your hand that was whiter than the snow of one night, and the colour of the foxglove on your cheek.

(A great shouting outside and burst of music. A march played. MANUS comes in, followed by FINTAN and PRINCE OF THE MARSHES. Shouts and music continue. He leads the DRAGON by a bridle. The others are in front of PRINCESS, huddled from DRAGON. QUEEN gets up on a chair.)

MANUS. Where is the Princess Nu? I have brought this beast to bow itself at her feet.

(All are silent. MANUS flings bridle to FINTAN'S hand. DRAGON backs out. ALL go aside from PRINCESS.)

NURSE. She is here dead before you.

MANUS. That cannot be! She was well and living half an hour ago.

NURSE (*rises.*) Oh, if she could but waken and hear your voice! She died with the fret of losing you, that is heaven's truth! It is tormented she was with these giving out you were done away with, and mocking at your weapons that they laid down to be the cleaver and the spit, till the heart broke in her like a nut.

MANUS (*kneeling beside her.*) Then it is I myself have brought the death darkness upon you at the very time I thought to have saved you!

NURSE. There is no blame upon you, but some that had too much talk! (*Goes on keening.*)

MANUS. What call had I to come humbugging and letting on as I did, teasing and tormenting her, and not coming as a King should that is come to ask for a Queen! Oh, come back for one minute only till I will ask your pardon!

DALL GLIC. She cannot come to you or answer you at all for ever.

MANUS. Then I myself will go follow you and will ask for your forgiveness wherever you are gone, on the Plain of Wonder or in the Many-Coloured Land! That is all I can do . . . to go after you and tell you it was no want of respect that brought me in that dress, but hurry and folly and taking my own way. For it is what I have to say to you, that I gave you my heart's love, what I never gave to any other, since first I saw you before me in my

sleep! Here, now, is a short road to reach you!
(*Takes sword.*)

PRINCE OF MARSHES (*catching his hand.*)
Go easy now, go easy.

MANUS. Take off your hand! I say I will die with her!

PRINCE OF MARSHES. That will not raise her up again. But I, now, if I have no skill in killing beasts or men, have maybe the means of bringing her back to life.

NURSE. Oh, my blessing on you! What is it you have at all?

PRINCE OF MARSHES (*taking bag from his AUNT.*) These three leaves from the Tree of Power that grows by the Well of Healing. Here they are now for you, tied with a thread of the wool of the sheep of the Land of Promise. There is power in them to bring one person only back to life.

FIRST AUNT. Give them back to me! You have your own life to think of as well as any other one!

SECOND AUNT. Do not spend and squander that cure on any person but yourself!

PRINCE OF MARSHES (*giving the leaves.*) And if I have given her my love that it is likely I will give to no other woman for ever, indeed and indeed, I would not ask her or wish her to wed with a very frightened man, and that is

what I was a while ago. But you yourself have earned her, being brave.

MANUS (*taking leaves.*) I never will forget it to you. You will be a brave man yet.

PRINCE OF MARSHES. Give me in place of it your sword; for I am going my lone through the world for a twelvemonth and a day, till I will learn to fight with my own hand.

(MANUS *gives him sword. He throws off cloak and outer coat and fastens it on.*)

NURSE. Stand back, now. Let the whole of ye stand back. (*She lays a leaf on the PRINCESS'S mouth and one on each of her hands.*) I call on you by the power of the Seven Belts of the Heavens, of the Twelve Winds of the World, of the Three Waters of the Sea!

(PRINCESS *stirs slightly.*)

KING. That is a wonder of wonders! She is stirring!

MANUS. Oh, my share of the world! Are you come back to me?

PRINCESS. It was a hard fight he wrestled with. . . . I thought I heard his voice. . . . Is he come from danger?

NURSE. He did. Here he is. He that saved you and that killed the Dragon, and that let on to be a serving boy, and he no less than one of the world's kings!

MANUS. Here I am, my dear, beside you, to be your comrade and your company for ever.

PRINCESS. You! . . . Yes, it is yourself. Forgive me. I am sorry that I spoke unkindly to you a while ago; I am ashamed that it failed me to know you to be a king. (*She stands up, helped by NURSE.*)

MANUS. It was my own fault and my folly. What way could you know it? There is nothing to forgive.

PRINCESS. But . . . if I did not recognise you as a king . . . anyway . . . the time you dropped the eggs . . . I was nearly certain that you were no cook! (*They embrace.*)

QUEEN. There now I have everything brought about very well in the finish!

(*A scream at door. TAIG rushes in, followed by SIBBY, in country dress. He kneels at the QUEEN'S feet, holding on to her skirt.*)

SIBBY. Bad luck and bad cess to you! Torment and vexation on you! (*Seizes him by back of neck and shakes him.*) You dirty little scum and leavings! You puny shrimp you! You miserable ninth part of a man!

QUEEN. Is it King or Dragon Killer he is letting on to be yet, or do you know what he is at all?

SIBBY. It's myself knows that, and does know it! He being Taig the tailor, my own son and my misfortune, that stole away from me a while ago, bringing with him the grand clothes of that young champion (*points to MANUS*) and his gold! To borrow a team of horses from the plough he did, and to bring away the magistrate's coach! But I followed him! I came tracking him on the road! Put off now those shoes that are too narrow for you, you red thief, you! For, believe me, you'll go facing home on shank's mare!

TAIG (*whimpering.*) It's a very unkind thing you to go screeching that out before the King, that will maybe strike my head off!

SIBBY. Did ever you know of anyone making a quarrel in a whisper? To wed with the King's daughter, you would? To go vanquish the water-worm you would? I'll engage you ran before you went anear him!

TAIG. If I didn't I'd be tore with his claws and scorched with his fiery breath. It is likely I'd be going home dead!

SIBBY. Strip off now that cloak and that bodycoat and come along with me, or I'll make split marrow of you! What call have you to a suit that is worth more than the whole of the County Mayo? You're tricky and too much tricks in you, and you were born for tricks! It

would be right you to be turned into the shape of a limping foxy cat!

TAIG (*weeping as he takes off clothes.*) Sure I thought it no harm to try to go better myself.

PRINCE OF MARSHES (*giving his cloak and coat.*) Here, I bestow these to you. If you were a while ago a tailor among kings, from this out you will be a king among tailors.

SIBBY (*curtseying.*) Well, then, my thousand blessings on you! He'll be as proud as the world of that. Now, Taig, you'll be as dressed up as the best of them! Come on now to Oughtmana, as it is long till you'll quit it. (*They go towards door.*)

DRAGON (*putting his head in at window.*) Manus, King of Sorcha, I am starved with the want of food. Give me a bit to eat.

FINTAN. He is not put down! He will devour the whole of us! I'd sooner face a bullet and ten guns!

DRAGON. It is not mannerly to eat without being invited. Is it any harm to ask where will I find a meal will suit me?

PRINCESS. Oh, does he ask to make a meal of me, after all?

DRAGON. I am hungry and dancing with the hunger! It was you, Manus, stopped me from the one meal. Let you set before me another.

KING. There is reason in that. Drive up now for him a bullock from the meadow.

DRAGON. Manus, it is not bullocks I am craving, since the time you changed the heart within me for the heart of a little squirrel of the woods.

MANUS (*taking a cocoa-nut from table.*) Here is a nut from the island of Lanka, that is called Adam's Paradise. Milk there is in it, and a kernel as white as snow. (*He throws it out.* DRAGON *is heard crunching.*)

DRAGON (*putting head in again.*) More! Give me more of them! Give them out to me by the dozen and by the score!

MANUS. You must go seek them in the east of the world, where you can gather them in bushels on the strand.

DRAGON. So I will go there! I'll make no delay! I give you my word, I'd sooner one of them than to be cracking the skulls of kings' daughters, and the blood running down my jaws. Blood! Ugh! It would disgust me! I'm in dread it would cause vomiting. That and to have the plaits of hair tickling and tormenting my gullet!

PRINCESS (*claps hands.*) That is good hearing, and a great change of heart.

DRAGON. But if it's a tame dragon I am from this out, I'm thinking its best for me to make away before you know it, or it's likely ye'll be yoking me to harrow the clods, or to be dragging the water-car from the spring well. So

good-bye the whole of ye, and get to your supper. Much good may it do you ! I give you my word there is nothing in the universe I despise, only the flesh-eaters of Adam's race !

CURTAIN.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote *The Dragon* in 1917, that now seems so many long years away, and I have been trying to remember how I came to write it. I think perhaps through some unseen inevitable kick of the swing towards gay-coloured comedy from the shadow of tragedy. It was begun seriously enough, for I see among my scraps of manuscript that the earliest outline of it is entitled "The Awakening of a Soul," the soul of the little Princess who had not gone "far out in the world." And that idea was never quite lost, for even when it had all turned to comedy I see as an alternative name "A Change of Heart." For even the Dragon's heart is changed by force, as happens in the old folk tales and the heart of some innocent creature put in its place by the conqueror's hand; all change more or less except the Queen. She is yet satisfied that she has moved all things well, and so she must remain till some new breaking up or re-birth.

As to the framework, that was once to have been the often-told story of a King's daughter given to whatever man can "knock three laughs out of her." As well as I remember the first was to have been when the eggs were broken, and another when she laughed with the joy of happy love. But the third was the stumbling-block. It was necessary the ears of the Abbey audience should be tickled at the same time as those of the Princess, and old-time jests like those of Sir Dinadin of the Round Table seem but dull to ears of to-day. So I called to my help the Dragon that has given this opportunity to so many heroes from Perseus in the Greek stories

to Shawneen in those of Kiltartan. And he did not sulk or fail me, for after one of the first performances the producer wrote: "I wish you had seen the play last night when a big Northern in the front of the stalls was overcome with helpless laughter, first by Sibby and then by the Dragon. He sat there long after the curtain fell, unable to move and wiping the tears from his eyes; the audience stopped going out and stood and laughed at him." And even a Dragon may think it a feather in his cap to have made Ulster laugh.

A. G.

Coole,

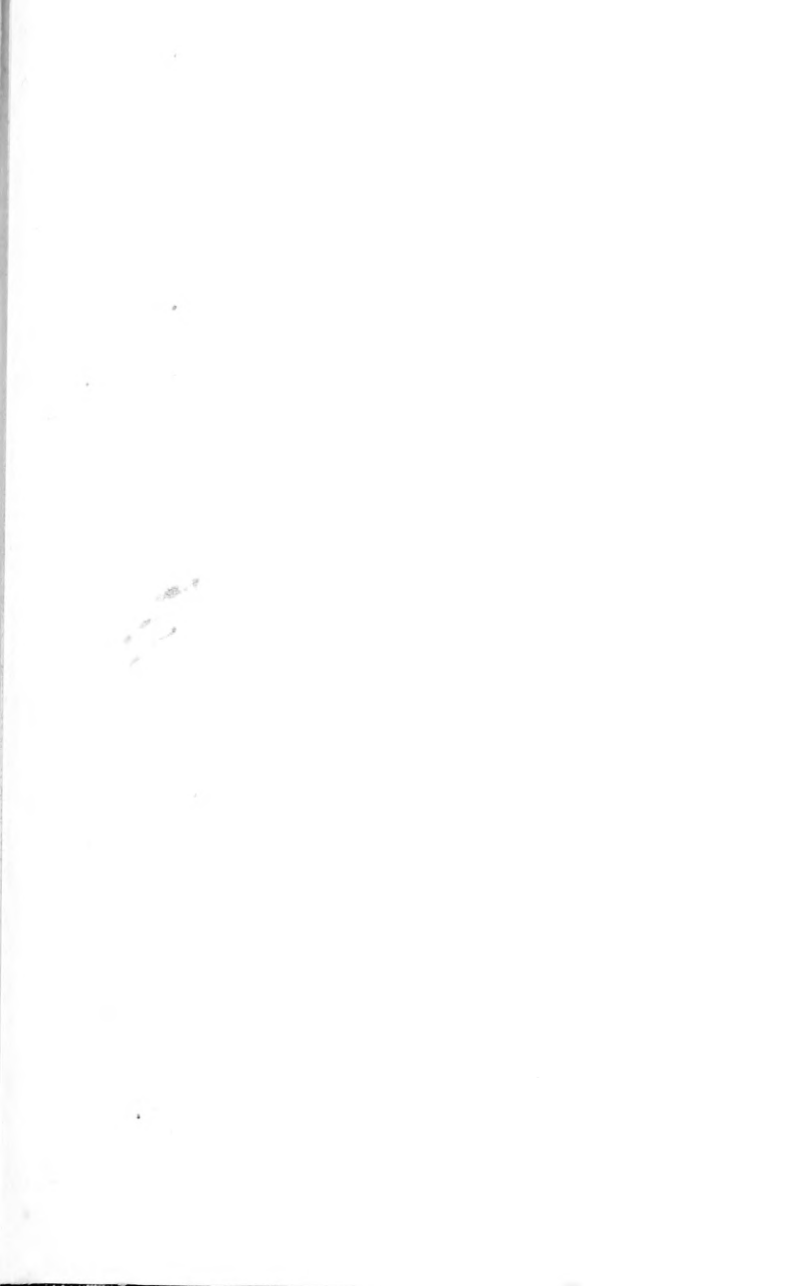
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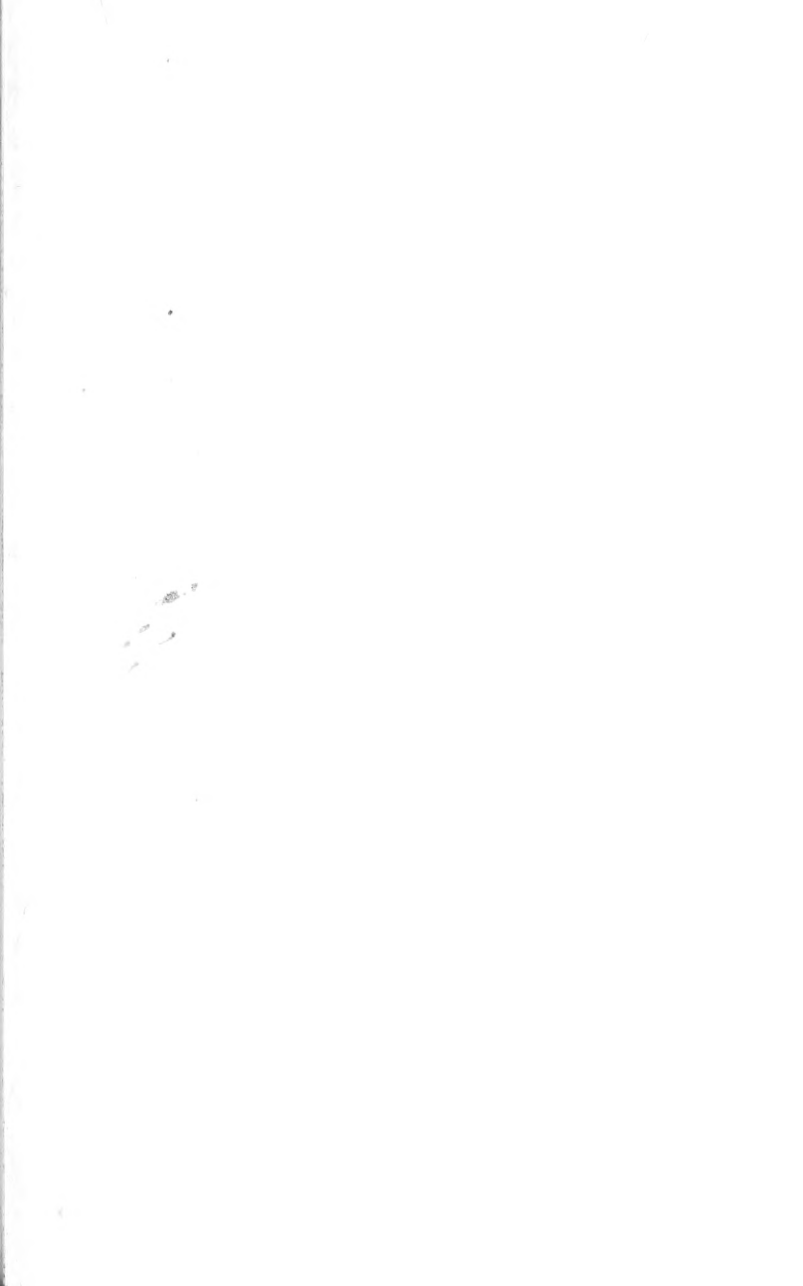
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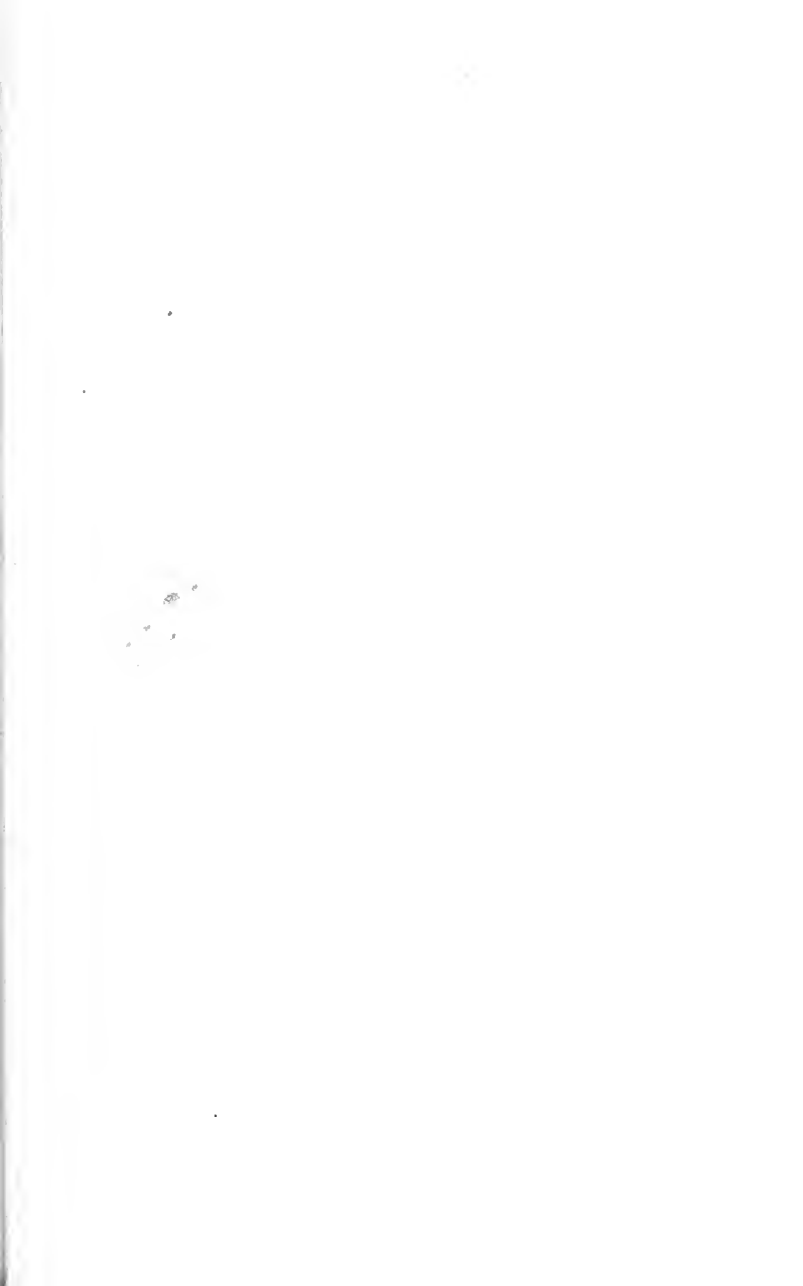
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The Dragon was first produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on 21st April, 1919, with the following cast:—

The King	BARRY FITZGERALD.
The Queen	MARY SHERIDAN
The Princess Nuala	EITHNE MAGEE
The Dall Glic (The Blind Wise Man) ..	PETER NOLAN
The Nurse	MAUREEN DELANY
The Prince of the Marshes	J. HUGH NAGLE
Manus—King of Sorcha	ARTHUR SHIELDS
Fintan—The Astrologer	F. J. MacCORMICK
Taig	FLORENCE MARKS
The Dragon	SEAGHAN BARLOW
The Porter	STEPHEN CASEY
The Gatekeeper	HUBERT M'GUIRE
Two Aunts of the Prince of the Marshes	ESME WARD DYMPHNA DALY







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